Demolition Review Committee – June 15, 2010

Board members present included Fred Richards, Chairman, Phil Donovan, Jim McConahan, Bob Johnson and Liz Hengen. Also present was Craig Walker, Zoning Administrator.

Chairman Richards gave opening comments and explained the authority of the Board and the process.

Deb McNeish, Principal of Conant School was present along with Dr. Christine Rath, CUSD Superintendent, Pip Lewis, Architect HMFA, Kassandra Ardinger, President of the School Board and Jack Dunn, member of the school Board. Pip Lewis gave introductions. They outlined the project. Described Conant school as it currently exists. They gave an overview of the planned project.

Dr. Rath gave an overview of the school's process. They are trying to maintain the neighborhood schools within the downtown area.

Ms. Ardinger commented on the fact that their public forums were well attended. There seemed to be little issue with saving the Conant School. Deb McNeisch concurred with Ms. Ardinger's comments. The building is inefficient. Jack Dunn of the school Board stated that extensive renovations would leave very little of the original building with high costs incurred.

Fred Richards opened the floor to public comments while keeping the School Board at the table.

Rick Watrous of 9 Wilson Avenue has been a resident and parent. His children attended school there from 1997 to 2007. He never heard complaints about the school from the children, staff or parents. He appreciates the front yard and use for accessibility purposes. He supports the smaller schools. The children have better educational experiences in a smaller school. It is his opinion that the project of tearing down the schools seem to be driven by the School Board, not by the public. He is concerned that the public will look back and regret demolition. He supports renovation, not demolition.

Mary Lou Rust has been a resident since 1940. Her husband attended Conant school. She is opposed to the new building and opposed to consolidation. She is concerned with travel and bussing. She is concerned with the fiscal impact on the tax payers. She had a question on the historic registry of buildings. She would like to see the demolition prevented and have them modify the existing building. She is not in favor of the demolition.

Bob Monson, in support of the demolition. He has been a resident for 30 years. He retired as the facilities manager for Concord School District. The District has been looking into this since the completion of Concord High School. He is concerned with inequality. There is a declining enrollment. He agrees with the desire to maintain a downtown school rather than outlying areas. The decision process has been a multi-Board issue, not a single Board. He descried the physical conditions of the building – a portion only has a crawl space; they can't perform (easily) maintenance inspections; issues with air quality and ventilation; issues with construction standards; concerns with fire spread and safety and drainage issues in the playground and bacterial issues due to standing water.

Fred Richards explained the authority of the Heritage Commission. They are advisory only, outside of the HI district. They may not stop or prohibit demolition. This is an opportunity for discussion. Perhaps may it may change in the future. He called for additional public testimony.

Mary Lou Rust made a statement confirming that the school can do as they wish.

Phil Donovan stated that they concurred with the authority as stated by the Chairman. He did as if any architectural features were to be incorporated in the proposed building.

Pip Lewis stated that the intent is to incorporate some features and character into the new building; i.e. cupola.

McConaha did not agree that demolition is the only option. He commented that the buildings are deemed worthy of preservation, National Historic Preservation list. He commented on the original hopes of the school Board and public of renovation vs. demolition. He commented on other projects in other communities where renovations worked. Why didn't it work here?

Jack Dunn stated that the feasibility of savings didn't properly provide for the best outcome.

Kass Ardinger stated that the original schematics were preliminary and very broad. When it came down to final plans in order to have equality between all 5 schools demo and new best option. Renovation is not the best use of the tax payer's money.

Dr. Christine Rath explained her view of why demolition was the proper choice. Renovated design is not adequate for the desired outcome.

Pip Lewis gave further explanation of why a renovated building would not be workable or adequate.

Jack Dunn commented on HMFA ability to balance demolition vs. renovation.

Bob Johnson stated that he liked the wooden and historic buildings. The new building is approximately 40,000 s.f.? (Confirmed.) Similar size footprint? (Yes.) What considerations were given to adding the second floor to the existing building?

Pip Lewis looked at it and could not come up with a workable configuration. She gave explanation of the structural issues. She recognized the structural engineer who was present.

Chad Montrose (structural engineer) stated that there was not sufficient structuralism to add to the second floor.

Jack Dunn commented on the degree of regulations for the kids in the buildings, Codes, etc.

Bob Johnson asked if a second story addition could be allowed. (They considered it.) When did the options stop?

Jack Dunn stated the options stopped when the vote was taken to choose designs.

Kass Ardinger stated that the school Board followed the Architectural Review Process to choose the design (Architectural) firm. She gave an explanation of how the process worked and how the decision was made.

Bob Johnson asked what the cost differences were between renovation and demolition.

Jack Dunn stated there was a \$300,000 difference without full program requirements. (Not including other incidental costs to bring the school fully up to par with other schools.)

Jim McConahan asked if it were renovation did it meet the Life Safety.

Pip Lewis stated that it did, but not the program desired. The existing layout is impractical and a difficult and inadequate space.

Jack Dunn stated that there would be problems with placing students during renovations. It will be disruptive. Studies show a drop in academic levels when something like this takes place.

Bob Johnson commented that he was not convinced that modifying the existing space and adding on would not have worked. If they demolition, will they save the existing cupola?

Jim McConahan asked when the demolition starts? (June 2012.) When will construction begin? (Winter of 2012.)

Fred Richards reviewed the schedule of changes for the upcoming public hearing on Kimball and Morrill Buildings and the Kimball neighborhood houses.

Meeting adjourned 6:05 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST,

Craig Walker, CLERK DEMOLITION REVIEW COMMITTEE